The Food Situation in a World at War

THE articles included in this group do not attempt to present a complete description of the food situation in the countries directly effected by the war. They are intended rather to indicate the general features of the situation in the different groups of countries involved. The food supply of the United Kingdom is affected by the war in one way, that of Italy in another, that of Russia in another, and that of Latin America in still another way.

The information presented is sketchy and not very accurate in any particular instance, but the over-all situation is about as described even within one country. The exception to this is probably Russia. Students of the Russian food situation, coming at it from different approaches and using different methods of combining the data, have arrived at somewhat divergent conclusions. None of these, however, give any basis for optimism about food conditions until large areas of western Russia can be reconquered and restored to agricultural production.

The contributors of these articles are nearly all in the public service and in as close touch with the available data as one can be. If others had written these articles, they would have been obliged to obtain most of their information from this group.—J. D. BLACK.

IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

By E. M. H. LLOYD

THE people of Britain have been holding their own for three years like a beleaguered garrison, exposed to submarine and bomber attack and threatened with land invasion. Successful provisioning and rationing of the garrison has done much to make this possible.

Before the war the Government had acquired reserves of wheat, sugar, and fats, and from the outset the Ministry of Food has been the sole buyer of imported cereals, meat, sugar, oilseeds, and dairy produce.

The policy of the Government has been to reduce imports to the extent required by the shipping position. This has been done by increasing home food production, by cutting out the more bulky and less essential food imports, and by rationing nearly all foods except bread, flour, potatoes, and fresh fruit and vegetables. Economy of tonnage has meant exclusion of animal feed cargoes amounting to about six million tons in peacetime; elimination of canned and fresh fruit imports to the extent of more than a million tons; substitution of national whole-meal flour of 85 per cent extraction for ordinary white flour; and increased imports of concentrated foods like cheese, dried milk, dried eggs, and lard from the United States.

British farmers have increased their acreage under crops by more than 50 per cent. Wheat output is nearly 40 per cent, barley 45 per cent, and oats 75 per cent higher than in 1939. Owing to reduced imports of animal feed, home-produced meat and eggs are down; but milk production during the spring and summer was higher than in 1941.

Meat consumption has been cut by about 25 per cent and sugar by one-third; fresh and canned fruits are limited to home supplies; the sale of cream and ice cream has been prohibited to conserve milk supplies. Fat supplies are about 10 per cent below normal, the reduction in butter being offset by in-

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creased animal and vegetable lard and margarine. Tea has been cut by about 25 per cent. Dried fruits, preserves, biscuits, canned meats, and canned fish add variety to what would otherwise be a monotonous diet, and are rationed under a points rationing scheme which gives freedom of choice to consumers. The most popular of this group of foods, the demand for which cannot be fully met, is dried vine fruits. Even chocolate and candy are now rationed at three ounces per head per week.

Bread and potatoes are unrationed. They serve as a buffer to fill any deficiency in total calories, and consumption of these foods is somewhat higher than before the war.

For 90 per cent of the population, wartime diet thus represents a reduction to a simpler and more Spartan standard, while the poorest 10 per cent are probably better fed than before. The leveling process has been brought about both by price control and by rationing. Maximum prices are fixed for all foods except some fresh fruits and vegetables. Increased wartime costs are met by food subsidies now running at about £125,000,000 ($500,000,000) per annum. Mothers, children, and invalids are given priority in the supply of milk, orange juice, and vitamin products. Differential supplies of meat and other rationed foods are allotted to workers' canteens; miners, agricultural laborers, and other outdoor workers without canteen facilities get twice the normal cheese ration. Meals taken in industrial canteens, "British Restaurants," and ordinary catering establishments account for about 10 per cent of total consumption.

Technique of control

The technique of control varies with different commodities, but the general picture may be summarized as follows:

1. Imported foods are acquired by the Ministry of Food in the country of origin, either through bulk contracts negotiated with governments (from the United States under lend-lease) or by purchases at market prices from exporters. They are handled on arrival at the ports by importers' pools acting as central agencies of the Ministry. The Ministry retains ownership in bulk stocks. It releases supplies at fixed prices to processors or wholesalers for distribution to retailers, and fixes manufacturers', wholesalers', and retailers' margins.

2. The Ministry fixes prices of home-produced foodstuffs in agreement with the Agricultural Departments. It has set up trade organizations to purchase on its behalf home-produced cattle, sheep, hogs, cheese, and eggs. It directs the purchase and distribution, or in some degree regulates the marketing, of milk, wheat, oats, potatoes, and other crops.

3. Allocation to individual firms, control of prices, standardization of qualities, and economy of transportation are facilitated through the creation of Wartime Associations controlled by the Ministry but managed by leading representatives of each trade or industry.

4. Consumers are tied to retailers of their choice for rations of meat, sugar, fats, cheese, eggs, and milk. Miscellaneous groceries are obtained under a points rationing scheme from any retailer.

5. Priority rations of milk and eggs are given to mothers, children, and invalids, and of cheese to agricultural workers and others. Differential allocations of meat, sugar, and fats are made to industrial workers in factory canteens.

6. The Ministry's trading losses, amounting to about £125,000,000 per annum, which are met by a subsidy from the Exchequer, have stabilized the cost-of-living index and thus promoted wage stability.

7. Nationwide publicity designed to

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explain the Ministry's policy and raise the standard of food preparation in the home is carried on by means of food advice centers, exhibits, press advertisements, lectures, and radio talks.

8. The total staff employed by the Ministry is approximately five thousand at headquarters and thirty thousand in seventeen divisional food offices and fifteen hundred local food offices.

9. There are about eight hundred enforcement officers. Eighty per cent of the prosecutions are for comparatively minor offenses; serious evasion is confined to a few criminals and "black market" operators, and is severely punished.

To sum up

In spite of lower imports, the population as a whole is probably fed as well as or better than a year ago. This is mainly due to two factors: first, lend-lease shipments from the United States, and second, enforced changes in national diet and stricter control of distribution.

Looking to the future, shipping and military necessities will continue to govern the food situation. Lord Woolton has warned the British public that further restrictions and changes in diet will be necessary in order to release shipping. There will be less variety of diet and greater consumption of potatoes, cheese, carrots, and green vegetables. Fresh eggs will be progressively replaced by imported egg powder. Milk consumption, which was well maintained during the past summer, will have to be curtailed this winter, but there will be a larger supply, given fair weather conditions, of leafy green vegetables.

When victory is achieved, rationing and price control are likely to remain for some time, since shipping and supplies will be needed for the relief of Europe. The special measures taken during the war, first to safeguard the nutrition of nursing and pregnant mothers and young children, and second, to make wider provision for feeding men at their jobs in factory canteens, are likely to remain as permanent features of post-war policy.

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CENTRAL AND NORTHERN EUROPE

By J. H. RICHTER

THE food self-sufficiency of central and northern Europe, at the standards of domestic agricultural production and consumption prevailing before the outbreak of the war, was over 80 per cent of total food consumption on a caloric basis. The western fringe of the area, including Switzerland, the Low Countries, and Norway, depended heavily on imports of foodstuffs and feedstuffs. Most of the central part, including Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Sweden, had attained a relatively high degree of self-sufficiency. Denmark, despite a high standard of domestic food consumption, and Poland, at a low nutritional standard, basically were surplus producers. Finland had a sizable deficit. These basic prewar conditions have been very important determinants of the food situation in this area since the German conquests of 1939–40.

Present food conditions in Belgium

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